

10 Great Things About Chester

1. The Rows

The historic Rows in Chester line the four main shopping streets in the city centre. They comprise of continuous half-timbered galleries which are reached by steps from street level. The Rows are unique to Chester, there is nothing quite like them in the rest of the world, and no one is quite sure why they were built in this way. Dating from the medieval era, it is probable that they were built on top of rubble remaining from the ruins of Roman buildings. Today The Rows are home to a whole host of shops, many are independent, boutique style shops which bring something special and unique to Chester's retail offering.

2. Roman Heritage

The Roman city of Chester was originally built to control the native tribes of North Wales and northern Britain. The layout of Chester today still follows the original Roman pattern, with a defensive wall circling the city. Today, the walls are the most complete in the UK and stretch over two miles, providing an usual and educational visitor attraction in the heart of the city. Chester was abandoned in the 5th century when the Romans left, with the Anglo-Saxons settling in the early 10th century. There are still Roman remains and influences to be found in the city today.

Chester is home to the largest Roman amphitheatre in Britain, used for entertainment and military training by the 20th Legion. Excavations by English Heritage and Chester City Council in 2004-5 revealed two successive stone-built amphitheatres with wooden seating. Today, visitors can sit on one of the seats within the amphitheatre and imagine what it would have been like as part of a 7,000 strong Roman crowd witnessing the gladiatorial combats. In the same area of Newgate, there is a reconstructed Roman garden which contains Roman pillars and a 'hypocaust' or under floor heating system.

3. Chester Races

According to official records Chester Racecourse is the oldest racecourse still in use in England. Indeed, horse racing at Chester dates back to the sixteenth century. It is also thought to be the smallest racecourse of significance in England, at one mile and one furlong. The Chester Racecourse site was home to the famous and bloody Gotteddsday football match. The game was very violent and, in 1533, banned by the city, to be replaced in 1539 by horse racing. The first recorded race was held on February 9, 1539 with the consent of the Mayor Henry Gee, whose name led to the use of the term "gee-gee" for horses.

Today over 15 annual race meets are held at Chester Racecourse and draw in huge crowds from the North West and beyond, giving hotels, restaurants and bars in Chester a valuable source of income.

4. Cathedral

Chester Cathedral is a truly magnificent building, with its history spanning almost two thousand years. It is one of Chester's major tourist attractions, and within the city centre is probably the most visited and most important attraction. In a city steeped in heritage, the Cathedral is the embodiment of what is attractive about the city. It is an essential part of the medieval and modern history of Chester and forms a key part of the historic fabric of the city. The Cathedral boasts some wonderful sights, such as the Nave Mosaics dating back to 1880, and are said to be some of the finest in the country.

It is also home to Cathedral at Height, a guided tour that takes you behind the scenes providing an unparalleled level of public access. The tour lets you explore the bell-ringing chamber, get up close and personal with the stained glass, peer down on the fourteenth century quire stalls and Victorian organ, amble along the galleries and take in the panoramic views from the roof. The Cathedral Falconry and Nature Gardens are also home to a collection of magnificent birds of prey. Enjoy one of the daily flying displays, a falconry experience or explore the nature gardens and learn about the natural habitat of the birds of prey.

5. Unique experiences

Chester is a charming city with many unique features, which endears it to visitors and residents alike. There are many unusual and interesting facts that people may not know about Chester, the history of the Town Crier is certainly one. Chester is the only place in Britain to have retained the tradition of regular midday proclamations at a fixed place and time. Located at the pedestrianised intersection of the four main streets of Chester, the High Cross has been the site of proclamations since the Middle Ages.

Chester is also home to the Eastgate Clock which was built to commemorate Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee but wasn't formally unveiled until 1899 to celebrate Queen Victoria's 80th Birthday. The clock sits proudly on the city walls over the Eastgate to the city and is one of the city's most popular sights.

One of the best ways to discover Chester's fascinating past is to join a guided tour. Daily Walking Tours, Roman Tours operate from the Visitor Information Centre and are extremely popular with visitors to the city as they get to experience Chester from a different perspective, taking in all the wonderful sights of the black and white buildings, architecture and history. There are also seasonal open top bus tours operated by City Sightseeing and Chester Heritage Bus.

6. River Dee

The River Dee is a 70 mile long river that flows through England and Wales and has historically formed the county border of Gwynedd in Wales. To the east of Wrexham the river becomes the natural border between England and Wales before flowing under the A55 and northwards towards Chester.

Reaching Chester the riverside is home to boats offering cruises, bandstand and benches and is crossed by four bridges. Below the Old Dee Bridge is the Chester Weir which was built by Hugh Lupus (The Norman Earl of Chester - nephew of William the Conqueror) to power his corn mills. The Weir has been used throughout the centuries to power corn, fulling, needle, snuff and flint mills.

Today a fish pass and fish counting station operate on the Weir to monitor the levels of salmon ascending the river, in addition to a weir gate to assist with navigating the river during spring tides.

ChesterBoat run daily river cruises from The Groves which pass by the beautiful Eaton Estate, home to the Duke of Westminster.

7. Boutique Shopping

Chester is well renowned for its quirky, unique, boutique shopping. As well as hosting a wide range of high street brands, you'll find a wealth of unusual independently run shops along the side streets and famous Rows. Watergate Street, branded 'The Independent Quarter', is mainly filled with independents, from galleries to clothing boutiques, trendy bars and quaint café's, all a stone's throw from the main shopping street and an absolute must when visiting Chester.

8. Chester Zoo

Chester Zoo is continually winning awards for being one of the top attractions in the country and upon visiting you'll soon see why! It is home to over 20,000 animals and over 500 species including some of the most endangered in the world. From magnificent elephants and rhinos to delicate butterflies there's something different to see around every corner.

Islands Chester Zoo opened in summer 2015 and takes you on a unique expedition through six different south east Asian island habitats. Travel over bridges to pass between the islands as you discover some of the animals that live in the natural habitats. You can even take a jungle river cruise as part of the experience, explore the indoor rainforest and walk-through an aviary giving you the chance to get up close to the plants and animals.

Chester Zoo prides itself on being one of the world's leading centres for conservation, working in the UK and worldwide to help protect animals and plants from extinction.

9. Chester Grosvenor Hotel

The 5 star Chester Grosvenor and its predecessors, The Golden Talbot and The Royal, have played a leading part in the social, cultural and political life of the city and today, The Chester Grosvenor has become one of Britain's leading international hotels.

Standing alongside the Eastgate Clock, The Chester Grosvenor is one of the city's greatest landmarks with its black and white timbered façade. The hotel has an award winning, Michelin starred Restaurant, Simon Radley at the Chester Grosvenor which has retained its coveted star since 1990 and also has four AA rosettes; a luxurious spa with a range of over forty rituals and treatments as well as 68 luxury guestrooms or 12 lavish suites.

10. Great base

Chester is positioned in the county of Cheshire, in the North West of England making it the perfect base for exploring not only the beautiful city itself but the county of Cheshire, North Wales, the Wirral, Liverpool, Manchester and the rest of Britain. It has excellent transport links by road and rail as well as being within 40 minute drive of both Manchester and Liverpool John Lennon Airports.